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ABSTRACT

Despite many folklore and cultural history projects seeking to identify the formative immigrant groups of Appalachia and their contributions, there has yet to be a systematic effort to connect Appalachian English to regional varieties of British English. This paper examines 40 grammatical features characteristic of Appalachian speech and identifies which are most likely Scotch-Irish and which are English. More resistant to change than vocabulary or pronunciation, grammar can be determined from old documents, and can be quantified. Table 1 lists the 40 features by parts of speech, and indicates whether the historical currency of each feature both in Britain and in the U.S. was general or restricted. Table 2 groups the features according to five types of grammatical structures: inflectional forms; word order patterns; grammatical categories' morphological forms differing from other dialects; and function words. Table 3 removes items whose locale of British origin is questionable and quantifies the five grammatical structural types by general or Appalachian usage and by general British, south British, or Scotch-Irish origin. Of 25 features with only Appalachian usage, 16 are of Scotch-Irish origin. The results suggest a strong link in the grammatical systems of Scotch-Irish English and Appalachian English, a link extending across a range of grammatical feature types. This report contains 31 references. (SV)

THE ROOTS OF APPALACHIAN ENGLISH:

SCOTCH-IRISH OR SOUTHERN BRITISH?

by
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The Roots of Appalachian English: Scotch-Irish or Southern British?

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In the popular television series The Story of English and the resulting best-selling book (McCrum et al. 1986), the idea of tracing varieties of American English back to Britain has recently gained renewed attention. One episode of the series, A Muse of Fire, featured a New Englander dropping in on an East Anglian pub, purportedly in search of his Puritan ancestors' speech patterns. A later show, The Guid Scots Tongue, examined the English of Scotland, exemplified by a Scotsman reading from William Lorimer's 1983 translation of the New Testament into Scottish English. In the course of an hour this program made the case for how the language of Lowland Scotland and Northern Ireland evolved into the English used today by North Carolina's denizen mountaineers, those latter-day descendants of hardy "Scotch-Irish" frontiersmen, and even into the Citizens Band Radio slang of long-distance truck drivers.[1]

American linguistic scholars have long been interested in exploring the roots of American English in the British Isles, notably in the early days of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada project in the nineteen thirties and forties (Kurath 1929, 1949). But for a number of reasons their progress has been slow, and in recent decades they have said little about tracing such connections, as it has become clear how much work is required to pin them down.[2]

Linking Appalachian culture and speech with the British Isles has been a part of the larger question of trans-Atlantic connections from the beginning, with varying commentators various labeling the region's language as "Scotch-Irish," "British," "(Elizabethan) English," or the

like. However, while scholars in other fields have made significant progress in describing the trans-Atlantic diffusion of cultural patterns into Appalachia, the same has hardly been the case for language patterns.

For decades, hosts of folklore researchers and collectors have prowled the hills of Southern Appalachia to study the spread of Scottish, Irish, and English traits and to capture the echoes of early American immigrants in song, in story, and in voice. One early example was Englishman Cecil Sharp, who sought Child ballads in Eastern Kentucky in 1916 and 1917 with his assistant Maud Karpeles (Sharp 1932). Many others could easily be cited.

Most recently, Civil War historian Grady McWhinney in Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways of the Old South (1988) has articulated the provocative claim that such personality traits as hospitableness, love of leisure, propensity for violent behavior, and aversion to work were carried over from Ireland, Scotland, and the "Celtic Fringe" areas of the British Isles to the American South as a whole and were reinforced enough to steer the "Celtic" South onto a collision course with the "English" North, most of whose early immigrants came from the South and East of Britain, in that fateful year of 1861.

Closer to home, many authorities within Appalachia, such as John C. Campbell (1921), Josiah Combs (1943), and Cratis Williams (1961), the latter two native to the region, have devoted a good deal of energy to untying the early settlement patterns in an effort to determine the collective genealogy of the region's inhabitants and to assess the relative proportions of Scotch-Irish, English, and German population groups in the region. To do this, Campbell and Combs examined patterns of surnames, Campbell of 1200 old families from Kentucky, Tennessee,

and North Carolina mountain areas and Combs of his Eastern Kentucky schoolchildren from local families. Campbell (p. 65) found equal portions of English and Scotch-Irish, while Combs' smaller sample included predominantly English names.[3] One explicit purpose of such research was, in addition to the straightforward calculation of national stocks in Appalachia, was to temper the types of extravagant statements about the role of the Scotch-Irish in settling and subduing the frontier that were being made around the turn of the twentieth century by such writers as Theodore Roosevelt in The Winning of the West. But an implicit goal, for Campbell and Williams, was to provide, by exploring the history of Appalachia, a specific cultural identity for the region's people--an identity connected directly to Old World forebears--in the face of a prevailing national view that saw the region in negative terms as having little culture and an unflattering history. Of course, this goal of cultural affirmation also was held by many ballad-collectors and other researchers who have written about the region.

However, despite much work by folklorists and cultural historians to identify the formative immigrant groups of Appalachia and their contributions, and despite the assumption that the same should be possible for language, there has yet to be a systematic effort to make the language connection to regional varieties of British English, and only cursory statements have been made. While Cratis Williams often claimed that the distinctive features of Appalachian speech were mostly Scotch-Irish, other writers have claimed that they come primarily from the English of Southern Britain (thus producing the familiar statement that Appalachian English is "Elizabethan"). Neither Williams nor

anyone else, including linguistic scholars, has attempted the careful sorting out of the major strands woven together into Appalachian English and to calculate more precisely the significance of each one. The only partial exceptions to this are two short studies by Wylene Dial (1969) in West Virginia and Alan Crozier (1984) in Western Pennsylvania. The present paper examines the range of grammatical features noted as characteristic of Appalachian speech, to identity which are most likely Scotch-Irish and which are English (very little, if any, German influence on Appalachian grammar turns out to be detectable), and to compare the relative significance of these two linguistic ancestries.

Before turning to this, it is necessary to say a few things about the scope and significance of such a project. Why, despite frequent scattered comments in the literature, has a concerted assessment of the relative linguistic contributions of the aforementioned groups not been undertaken, especially given the keen interest over the past century in pinning down the ancestry of Appalachian people? These are basically two reasons for this.

1) First is a problem of knowledge and sources. Americans know quite little about the earlier stages of English spoken in Scotland and Northern Ireland (the general familiarity with the writings of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has no doubt led many writers to believe that Appalachian English is more "Elizabethan" than it actually is). Few American scholars, at least those who have written on the language of Appalachia, are acquainted with the fact that there is not one, but two multi-volume historical dictionaries of Scottish English, the Scottish National Dictionary (Grant and Murison 1931-84) and the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (Craigie and Aitken 1933-).

The question at hand cannot be addressed by using the Oxford English Dictionary, the best-known and most comprehensive historical dictionary of the language, because its coverage of non-literary and regional varieties of English is quite limited. All historical dictionaries, moreover, have built-in handicaps; being only as good as their written citation files, they are heavily biased toward literary language and offer little direct evidence on the speech patterns of the common people. Also, they suffer from the problem of negative evidence; that is, while we may discover from the entry of a word in a dictionary when and where that word was used, we cannot necessarily conclude from the absence of a word that it did not exist, or from the absence of a citation that a word was not used at a certain time and place.

Thus it is necessary to go beyond dictionaries and to consult linguistic studies and original sources themselves. An extensive literature on Scottish English does exist, though it is largely tucked away in the nooks of major British libraries is as there is yet no good bibliography to dig it out. The problem for the English language of Northern Ireland is that most of the few studies that have been done are unpublished.[4]

2) The second reason why such an assessment has not been achieved is that previous claims that Appalachian English was basically "Scotch-Irish" or basically "Elizabethan" lacked a methodology for making a determination.

The present paper draws on an extended research effort to identify the roots of Appalachian English, an effort that uses, as well as a wide range of reference works on American and British English,[5] primary sources (local dictionaries and archival material from the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries and consultations with local authorities in both Northern Ireland and Scotland). It bases the comparison of Appalachian English and Scotch-Irish English on a variety of sources not used heretofore by American linguists.

As far as the Appalachian material is concerned, the published resources have recently been marshaled in an annotated bibliography (McMillan and Montgomery 1989) and unparalleled unpublished resources (i.e. Joseph Hall's recordings of Smoky Mountain speech from the 1930s) are now being used to fill in the gaps between present-day Appalachian English and the language of the immigrant period (Montgomery and Hall forthcoming). In short, for the first time the research tools and materials are available to address the question of the ancestry of distinctive Appalachian speech patterns in a valid way.

This project utilizes a framework for comparison, based on principles of historical linguistics, that establishes linguistic and sociolinguistic standards by which individual features may be judged as deriving from one area of the British Isles or another (Montgomery 1989). In other words, it offers a principled basis for saying whether a-prefixing (in "a bear come a-runnin' at me") is Scotch-Irish, Southern British, German, or none of these. From the comparison undertaken in this paper, we can state much more precisely how "Elizabethan" and how "Scotch-Irish" Appalachian English is than has been the case before now.

This paper focuses on grammatical features rather than on vocabulary or pronunciation. Grammar has been shown by linguists to be "deeper" in a language and more resistant to change, at least rapid change, than the vocabulary and pronunciation of a language. Because grammatical features and forms usually exist in relation to one another

and participate in certain systems like the expression of verb tense or noun plurality, this makes them more likely to preserve traceable elements. By comparison, vocabulary is much more easily and quickly borrowed across languages and dialects. Pronunciation is also less stable, linguists have shown; even in isolated communities it continually evolves according to the social dynamics of the speakers. Grammatical features have two further advantages: they can be clearly determined from old written documents, and they are quantifiable.

Beyond the general motivation for undertaking this study--to pin down the ancestry of Appalachian culture and language--lies an important linguistic question of whether an assessment can be made. The most common view in American dialect studies is that features distinctive to one British dialect or another were probably brought to the American colonies, but they were more or less leveled out and lost in the colonial period. Thus a few items, it is thought, may have lingered on as "colonial lags" but most distinctive grammatical patterns in American English represent general patterns of rural and old-fashioned speech that have been inherited from the folk speech of Britain and were to be found throughout much of the U.S. in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at least for the white population. In other words, historians of American English are generally skeptical about how many older elements of specific British dialects have been preserved in the U.S. and especially about how many of these elements have been confined to a specific region of North America such as Appalachia.

Thus, to linguists, undertaking the comparison discussed here and as a result answering the questions about the roots of Appalachian

English will do at least three things: a) tell us about processes of dialect migration, contact, and change; b) show us how individual features of American English have evolved from their Old World progenitors; and c) fill in the gaps in the evolution of American English, particularly in the colonial period.

Methodology

We turn now to the assembled data, which are presented in four tables that attempt to give the broadest view of characteristic Appalachian grammatical features. Table 1 lists forty features, by part of speech, that are the primary items examined in this project so far (examples of each feature can be found in table 4 in the appendix). Table 1 indicates the determination to date, for each feature, as to whether its historical currency in Britain was general (column 1) or limited to a region of the British Isles (column 2) and also as to whether its distribution in the United States is or has been general (column 3) or limited to a specific region (column 4).

What is a "characteristic Appalachian grammatical feature"? This is a rough construct, and it will be taken here to represent a grammatical structure or category whose occurrence is more or less limited to the Appalachia or to the Midland territory (as defined by Kurath 1949:27) or which occurs to a significantly higher degree in these regions. It is not argued here that every feature in our tables is unique to the region; in fact, a number of features discussed in studies of Appalachian English are characteristic of older-fashioned American English in general (such as blowed and growed as past-tense forms). It is also not argued that all forty features in Table 1 are used by all Appalachian speakers or found throughout Appalachia. Many

of them are quite rare, many others definitely recessive, but all have been identified in the literature by more than one source as occurring in the Southern mountain region.[6]

Table 1: Catalog of Grammatical Features

Key to Catalog
Column 1 = General Usage in British Isles
Column 2 = Restricted Usage in British Isles
Column 3 = General Usage in United States
Column 4 = Restricted Usage in United States

(X = Definite Usage; ? = Probable Usage; SC = Scotland; IR = Northern Ireland; S BRI = Southern Britain; AP = Appalachia; MID = Midland Area (US); S = South (US)

	1	2	3	4
A. Verbs				
1. Third Person Plural Suffix -S (including IS) (with Nouns but not with Pronouns)		SC/IR		AP
2. Regularized Past Tense (BLOWED, THROWED, etc.)		S BRI	X	
3. GET TO/GO TO (= BEGIN TO)	?		?	
4. Multiple Modals (MIGHT COULD)		SC/IR		AP/S
5. LIKED TO (= ALMOST)	X			AP/S
6. A-prefixing		S BRI		AP
7. Perfective DONE		SC		AP/S
8. USED TO Preposed		?		AP
9. USED TO + WOULD, COULD		SC/IR		MID
10. NEED + Verb + -ED		SC		AP
Pronouns				
1. YALL, YOU ALL		SC/IR		AP/S
2. YOU'UNS/WE'UNS, etc.		SC/IR		AP
3. YOU/YE variation		SC/IR		AP
4. Combinations with ALL (WHO ALL, etc.)		SC/IR		AP/S
5. HISN/HERN/THEIRN/OURN		S BRI	X	
6. HISSELF/THEIRSELVES	X		X	
7. Ethical Dative	X			?AP/S
8. THEY existential		SC	X	
9. IT existential	X		X	

10. Subject Relative Pronoun Deletion	X		X	
11. HIT (= IT)	X			?AP/S
12. EVERWHAT/EVERWHICH/EVERWHO		?		AP/S
C. Nouns				
1. Zero Plural after Quantifier	X		X	
2. POSTES, NESTES, etc.		S BRI		MID
D. Prepositions				
1. Compounding	?		?	
2. ANENT (= OPPOSITE, NEARBY)	X			AP
3. FORNENT/FERNENT		SC/IR		AP
4. TILL (= TO)		SC/IR		MID/S
5. WAIT ON (= WAIT FOR)		SC/IR		MID/S
6. AGAIN/AGAINST (= BEFORE, BY THE TIME THAT)	X			AP
E. Conjunctions				
1. AGAIN/AGAINST (= BEFORE, BY THE TIME THAT)	X			AP
2. WHENEVER (= AT THE TIME THAT)		SC/IR		AP
3. TILL (= SO THAT)		?		?AP
4. AND in Absolute Phrases		SC/IR		?AP
5. NOR (= THAN)	X			MID
F. Adverbs				
1. Positive ANYMORE;		IR		MID
2. ALL THE FAR (= AS FAR AS)	?			AP
3. RIGHT (intensifier)	X		X	
4. YONDER	X		X	
5. YAN		?		AP

Space limitations prevent the explication of individual features beyond two examples. Feature A1, the suffix -S, which is common in Appalachian English on present-tense verbs after plural nouns (people knows) but not on present-tense verbs after plural personal pronouns (they know), has historically been limited to Scottish and Northern British speech, and by extension to the English of Northern Ireland. In the present day, so far as an exhaustive search of the literature shows (Montgomery 1989), it occurs with frequency only in Appalachian speech. Feature A6, a-prefixing, is historically almost unknown in Scottish English outside ballad style, while in Southern Britain it was a feature of folk speech for centuries; in the U.S. its use is largely confined to Appalachia and to the Ozarks, a cultural area largely derived from Appalachia.

Table 2 rearranges the forty features in Table 1 according to five types of grammatical structures:

1) inflectional forms (word endings);

2) word order patterns (the combination of two or more words in a distinct way);

3) categorical differences (involving a grammatical category not found in other dialects; often a familiar form such as done is employed in a way unfamiliar to other dialects);

4) morphological forms varying from other dialects;

5) function words (preposition, adverbs, and conjunctions whose function is to relate other words or elements in a clause to one another).

Table 2: Grammatical Features by Type

INFLECTIONAL FEATURES				
A1.	Third Person Plural Suffix -S (including IS)		SC/IR	AP
A2.	Regularized Past (BLOWED, THROWED, etc.)		S BRI	X
B5.	HISN/HERN/THEIRN/OURN		S BRI	X
C1.	Zero Plural after Quantifier	X		X
C2.	POSTES, NESTES, etc.		S BRI	MID
WORD ORDER				
A4.	Multiple Modals		SC/IR	AP/S
A8.	USED TO (Preposed)	?		AP
A9.	USED TO + WOULD, COULD		SC/IR	MID
A10.	NEED + Verb + -ED		SC	AP
B4.	Combinations with ALL		SC/IR	AP/S
B10.	Subject Relative Pronoun Deletion	X		X
D1.	Preposition Compounding	?		?
E4.	AND in Absolute Phrases		SC/IR	?AP
F1.	Positive ANYMORE;		IR	MID
F2.	ALL THE FAR (= AS FAR AS)	?		AP
CATEGORICAL DIFFERENCES				
A3.	GET TO/GO TO (= BEGIN TO)	?		?
A5.	LIKED TO (= ALMOST)	X		AP/S
A6.	A-prefixing		S BRI	AP
A7.	Perfective DONE		SC	AP/S
B1.	YALL, YOU ALL		SC/IR	AP/S
B2.	YOU'UNS/WE'UNS, etc.		SC/IR	AP
B7.	Ethical Dative	X		?AP/S
DIFFERENCES IN MORPHOLOGICAL FORM				
B3.	YOU/YE variation		SC/IR	AP
B6.	HISSELF/THEIRSELVES	X		X
B8.	THEY existential		SC	X
B11.	HIT (= IT)	X		?AP/S
B12.	EVERWHAT/EVERWHICH/EVERWHO	?		AP/S
FUNCTION WORDS				
B9.	IT existential	X		X
D2.	ANENT (= OPPOSITE, NEARBY)	X		AP
D3.	FORNENT/FERNENT		SC/IR	AP
D4.	TILL (= TO)		SC/IR	MID/S
D5.	WAIT ON (= WAIT FOR)		SC/IR	MID/S
D6.	AGAIN/AGAINST (= BEFORE, Prep.)	X		AP
E1.	AGAIN/AGAINST (= BEFORE, Conj.)	X		AP
E2.	WHENEVER (= AT THE TIME THAT)		SC/IR	AP
E3.	TILL (= SO THAT)	?		?AP
E5.	NOR (= THAN)	X		MID
F3.	RIGHT (intensifier)	X		X
F4.	YONDER	X		X
F5.	YAN		SC	AP

Table 3 collapses thirty-four items from Table 2 (all items whose specific locale of origin in Britain is questionable) and assigns numbers to each of these five types of grammatical structures according to their origin in the British Isles and their current distribution in this country.

Table 3: Types of Grammatical Features by Origin and Distribution (Omits items in Table 2 of Questionable Origin)

	Origin		
Feature Type/Distribution	General BRIT	SC/IR	S BRIT
INFLECTIONAL FEATURES			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	1	0	2
Appalachian/Midland Usage	0	1	1
WORD ORDER			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	1	0	0
Appalachian/Midland Usage	0	6	0
CATEGORICAL DIFFERENCES			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	0	0	0
Appalachian/Midland Usage	2	3	1
DIFFERENCES IN MORPHOLOGICAL FORM			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	1	1	0
Appalachian/Midland Usage	1	1	0
FUNCTION WORDS			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	3	0	0
Appalachian/Midland Usage	4	5	0
TOTAL			
General American Usage (includes Appalachia/Midland)	6	1	2
Appalachian/Midland Usage	7	16	2

Discussion and Conclusions

The strong contribution from Scotch-Irish English in all types of grammatical features: inflectional endings, word order patterns, grammatical categories, variant morphological forms, and individual function words as seen in Table 3. This is particularly true for word order patterns (like A4, "We might should go on", and A10, "That boy needs taught a lesson") and function words (like D4, till, and D, "wait on"). Only four items (A6, a-prefixing, and three inflectional features--the long plural in nouns like postes (C2), pronouns in -n like hern (B5), and regularized past-tense forms like blowed (A2) can be traced back specifically to Southern Britain and have been current in neither Scotland or Northern Britain. Although the contribution from Southern British English might seem minimal from looking at the middle column on Table 3, we must remember that Southern Britain and Scotland shared seven grammatical features that are now identified as Appalachian, including liked to (A5) and the ethical dative (B8). Moreover, the majority of grammatical features--the hundreds not in our tables--are also shared.

Of particular note is that many of the Scotch-Irish features are nowadays General Southern, indicating they spread throughout the South: multiple modals such as might could, perfective helping verb done, pronoun y'all, and preposition till, among others. Doubtless the general reason for this is they were carried into the Lower South by Scotch-Irish who came directly to Charleston and Savannah as well as by descendants of the earlier backcountry and Piedmont Scotch-Irish. Settlers were constantly on the move, looking for their "main chance," often crisscrossing each other's paths as they sought a better

situation. But not only do dialect forms often not confine themselves to one area for very long; more importantly, they take lives of their own, migrating according to such social factors as prestige, status, and so on.

While it is not very often that we can document the migration of speech forms before the modern age of audio recordings, an unusual emigration of Southerners in the post-bellum period allows us to verify the spread of such grammatical patterns as multiple modals and pronunciation tendencies as the identical sounding of pen and pin. Specifically, in the decade following the Civil War, around twenty thousand ex-Confederate Americans from the Lower South (mainly Texas, Georgia, and Alabama) who decided they could not tolerate living in the reunited United States moved to Brazil. Their descendants today, while bilingual, continue to speak English with a distinct Southern accent; they have no recognition of might could, nor do they e er pronounce ten as tin (Montgomery and Melo 1989, Bailey and Smith 1989). These Upper South/Appalachian linguistic features must have spread into the Lower South after the ex-Confederates left, later in the nineteenth or early in the twentieth centuries. Thus for speech patterns Appalachia is demonstrably a part of the South--a region within a region.

Our analysis and discussion have focused on tracing connections in grammatical patterns between Appalachian English and varieties of British English. Such an effort even at a relatively shallow time depth of less than three hundred years obviously faces a number of analytical and documentary challenges. By comparison, previous attempts to make the connection have been small-scale, unsystematic, and tentative. If we assume the relative homogeneity of what we have been calling Scotch-Irish English and Appalachian English and if we

assume the correct identification and comparison of grammatical forms in context from our work with dictionaries and grammars, local linguistic literature, original documents, and consultation with local observers, we can posit a strong link in the grammatical systems of Scotch-Irish English and Appalachian English, a link that extends across a range of types of grammatical features, Moreover, we can see some of the outlines of how Scotch-Irish English extended into the Lower South.

It is hoped that these results will be relevant not only to linguists, but also to cultural geographers, historians, folklorists, and other scholars concerned with the diffusion of Old World patterns into the New World. It may just be possible, as a result of the type of research outlined and begun here, that we will finally be able to say how "Elizabethan" or "Scotch-Irish" Appalachian English in fact is.

Notes

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2. One might compare Kurath 1949, whose first chapter, "The English of

the Eastern States: a Perspective" (page 1-10), focuses in detail on British and Continental European sources of American vocabulary with Carver 1987, a work comparable in scope written a generation later. Carver has almost nothing to say about such sources.

3. These calculations have questionable reliability. Surnames often reveal nothing about ancestry. Among other problems, as Campbell states, is the fact that many English names have been used by the Irish or the Scottish for centuries.

4. A trove of these is on deposit at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra Manor, Holywood, County Down, Northern Ireland.

5. Carver 1987, Cassidy 1985, Craigie and Aitken 1933- , Feagin 1979, Grant and Murison 1931-84, Hall n.d., Hunter 1925, Jesperson 1954, McDavid 1958, Visser 1970, Wentworth 1944, Wilson 1952, Wolfram and Christian 1976.

6. It must be emphasized that these assessments reflect information from reference works (dictionaries, historical grammars, etc.) and original documents. They are only as reliable as the sources on which they are based and cannot be claimed to be definitive. As stated earlier in this paper, reference works do not give negative information on whether a certain form does not occur at a particular time and place. While the number and range of sources from which information is drawn enhances the reliability of categories assigned in Table 1, for some forms (such as GET TO and GO TO meaning "begin to") no information has been found on the regional demarcations either in Britain or in America. Such forms are included in Table 1 because they are quite common in Appalachian speech, are discussed in studies of Appalachian

speech, and are apparently not widely found in rural and old-fashioned speech elsewhere in the U.S. In many cases the categorizations, even the inclusion of forms, in Table 1 are subjective, but grammatical forms widely used throughout the U.S. are excluded even if common in Appalachia. These include ain't, the combination of objective pronouns (e.g., me and him) used as a subject, the use of was with plural subjects (they was, etc.), and a number of others.

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